

How To Make A Proper Pruning Cut To An Urban Tree

City Of Takoma Park Urban Forest Division “How To” Fact Sheet

Why The Concern?

Whenever we make a pruning cut to a tree, a wound is made. The object is to make the wound in such a way as to give the tree the best chance possible to heal. When a cut is made improperly, the tree may not be able to heal the wound thus setting the tree up for decay, canker fungi, insects and other problems.

Common Reasons For Pruning

All trees require periodic pruning. When trees are young, pruning is necessary to help provide strong crown structure. As trees age, pruning is required to perform hazard reduction and to maintain health. The three most common reasons for pruning are:

- Safety – pruning a tree for safety involves removing branches that could fall and cause injury or property damage.
- Health – pruning for health involves removing diseased or insect infested wood, thinning the crown to increase airflow (to decrease foliar fungal diseases), and removing crossing and rubbing branches.
- Aesthetics – pruning for aesthetics involves enhancing the natural form and character of trees.

How?

- 1) Make a small cut on the underside of the branch on the branch side of the stem collar. (See point A on the diagram.) This will break the bark and a small amount of cambial tissue and prevent a tear from running along the under side of the branch.
- 2) An inch or two farther up the branch, starting on the topside of the branch, cut all the way through the branch leaving a stub. (See point B on the diagram.)
- 3) Finally, make a third cut parallel to and just on the branch side of the branch collar to reduce the length of the stub. (See point C on the diagram.)

What Not To Do

- Flush cuts – These cuts are made inside the branch collar and are more or less flush with the stem the branch is being cut from. These cuts can inhibit the flow of nutrients to the above portion of the tree and make it hard for the tree to heal the wound, setting the tree up for decay, fungal, and insect problems down the road.
- Stub cuts – These cuts are made outside the branch collar and leave a stub where the branch once was. These cuts prevent the tree from healing the wound and encourage decay to set in where the branch collar was.

Proper Pruning

